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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Plaintiff,

v.

JATIN BHAKTA
ROY DREES

Defendants.

CASE NO. 1:21-CR-00023 NONE-SKO

STIPULATION REGARDING EXCLUDABLE
TIME PERIODS UNDER SPEEDY TRIAL ACT;
FINDINGS AND ORDER

PROPOSED DATE: August 18, 2021

TIME: 1:00 p.m.

COURT: Hon. Sheila K. Oberto

This case is scheduled for a status conference on April 21, 2021, but the parties have agreed to move this hearing to August 18, 2021. This Court has issued General Orders 611-630 to address public health concerns related to COVID-19, including the temporary suspension of jury trials and restrictions on access to court buildings. Initially the Fresno courthouse was closed through June 15, 2020, but it has since been closed until further notice.

Although the General Orders address district-wide health concerns, the Supreme Court has emphasized that the Speedy Trial Act's end-of-justice provision "counteract[s] substantive open-endedness with procedural strictness," "demand[ing] on-the-record findings" in a particular case. *Zedner v. United States*, 547 U.S. 489, 509 (2006). "[W]ithout on-the-record findings, there can be no exclusion under" § 3161(h)(7)(A). *Id.* at 507. And moreover, any such failure cannot be harmless. *Id.* at 509; *see also United States v. Ramirez-Cortez*, 213 F.3d 1149, 1153 (9th Cir. 2000) (explaining that a judge ordering and ends-of-justice continuance must set forth explicit findings on the record "either orally or in writing").

Based on the plain text of the Speedy Trial Act—which *Zedner* emphasizes as both mandatory and inexcusable—the General Order requires specific supplementation. Ends-of-justice continuances are excludable only if “the judge granted such continuance on the basis of his findings that the ends of justice served by taking such action outweigh the best interest of the public and the defendant in a speedy trial.” 18 U.S.C. § 3161(h)(7)(A). Moreover, no such period is excludable unless “the court sets forth, in the record of the case, either orally or in writing, its reason or finding that the ends of justice served by the granting of such continuance outweigh the best interests of the public and the defendant in a speedy trial.” *Id.*

The General Orders exclude delay in the “ends of justice.” 18 U.S.C. § 3161(h)(7). Although the Speedy Trial Act does not directly address continuances stemming from pandemics, natural disasters, or other emergencies, this Court has discretion to order a continuance in such circumstances. For example, the Ninth Circuit affirmed a two-week ends-of-justice continuance following Mt. St. Helens’ eruption. *Furlow v. United States*, 644 F.2d 764 (9th Cir. 1981). The court recognized that the eruption made it impossible for the trial to proceed. *Id.* at 767-68; *see also United States v. Correa*, 182 F. Supp. 326, 329 (S.D.N.Y. 2001) (citing *Furlow* to exclude time following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the resultant public emergency). The coronavirus is posing a similar, albeit more enduring, barrier to the prompt proceedings mandated by the statutory rules.

In light of the societal context created by the foregoing, this Court should consider the following case-specific facts in finding excludable delay appropriate in this particular case under the ends-of-justice exception, § 3161(h)(7). When continued, this Court should designate a new date for the hearing. *United States v. Lewis*, 611 F.3d 1172, 1176 (9th Cir. 2010) (noting any pretrial continuance must be “specifically limited in time”).

STIPULATION

Plaintiff United States of America, by and through its counsel of record, and defendants, by and through defense counsel of record, accordingly stipulate as follows:

1. By previous order this matter was set for a status conference hearing on April 21, 2021. The Court more recently has invited a continuance of this hearing if counsel do not believe that anything substantial can be accomplished at the currently scheduled hearing.

2. By this stipulation, the parties agree that the next status conference be scheduled for August 18, 2021, and to exclude time between April 21, 2021, and August 18, 2021, under 18 U.S.C. §§ 3161(h)(7)(A) and 3161(h)(7)(B)(i), (ii) and (iv).

3. The parties agree, and request that the Court find the following:

a) Counsel for defendants desire additional time to consult with their clients, to review the current charge and conduct additional investigation and research related to the charge, to discuss potential resolutions with their clients, and to evaluate and potentially prepare pretrial motions. In part this is because the government has continued its investigation of the crimes, the government has provided supplemental discovery, and counsel and the defendants will benefit from additional time to consider this new material.

b) Counsel for defendants believe that failure to grant the above-requested continuance would deny them the reasonable time necessary for effective preparation, taking into account the exercise of due diligence.

c) The government does not object to the continuance and joins in the request.

d) In addition to the public health concerns cited by General Orders 611-630 and presented by the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, an ends-of-justice delay is particularly apt in this case because counsel or other relevant individuals have been encouraged to telework and minimize personal contact to the greatest extent possible. It will be difficult to avoid personal contact should the hearing proceed.

e) Based on the above-stated findings, the ends of justice served by continuing the case as requested outweigh the interest of the public and the defendants in a trial within the original date prescribed by the Speedy Trial Act.

f) For the purpose of computing time under the Speedy Trial Act, 18 U.S.C. § 3161, et seq., within which trial must commence, the time period from April 21, 2021, to August 18, 2021, inclusive, is deemed excludable under 18 U.S.C. §§ 3161(h)(7)(A) and 3161(h)(7)(B)(i), (ii) and (iv) because it results from a continuance granted by the Court at the request of the parties on the basis of the Court's finding that the ends of justice served by taking such action outweigh the best interest of the public and the defendants in a speedy trial.

4. Nothing in this stipulation and order shall preclude a finding that other provisions of the Speedy Trial Act dictate that additional time periods are excludable from the period within which a trial must commence.

IT IS SO STIPULATED.

Dated: April 13, 2021

PHILLIP A. TALBERT
Acting United States Attorney

/s/ DAVID L. GAPP
DAVID L. GAPP
Assistant United States Attorney

Dated: April 13, 2021

/s/ JARED THOMPSON
JARED THOMPSON
Counsel for Defendant
JATIN BHAKTA

Dated: April 13, 2021

/s/ CHARLES LEE
CHARLES LEE
Counsel for Defendant
ROY DREES

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COURT: Hon. Sheila K. Oberto

FINDINGS AND ORDER

The Court has reviewed and considered the stipulation filed by the parties on April 13, 2021, and also reviewed the record of this case. For the reasons stated in the stipulation the period of time from April 21, 2021, to August 18, 2021, inclusive, is deemed excludable under 18 U.S.C. §§ 3161(h)(7)(A) and 3161(h)(7)(B)(i), (ii) and (iv) because it results from a continuance granted by the Court at the request of the parties on the basis of the Court's finding that the ends of justice served by taking such action outweigh the best interest of the public and the defendant in a speedy trial.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: April 13, 2021

/s/ Sheila K. Oberto
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE